

**Knowing what's right and doing right: Sport management students' perceptions of ethical decision making.**

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Ethics in the business world have recently been pressed to the forefront of our news media. Sport management is not immune to similar types of business ethics violations that have plagued the US business community by exploiting human dignity, justice and utility. Hums, Barr, and Gullion (1999) proposed that sport managers face many ethical dilemmas in the course of business decisions within all areas of the sport industry; including professional, intercollegiate, interscholastic and recreational sports. Rudd (2007) presented concerns with the dearth of empirical data on ethical decisions making processes of sport managers. In the business context, research suggests that ethical decisions of business managers were made at a lower level of reasoning for business decisions than for social decisions (Weber, 1990). If this trend is also found in sport management, then possibly training in ethical decision-making may need to be at the forefront of sport management education. Rudd (2006) examined sport management program posted on the NASSM website and determined that 57 out of 149 (38%) bachelor programs, 35 out of 110 (32%) master programs, and 3 out of 17 (18%) doctoral programs require students to take ethics courses. This may improve as COSMA standards require ethics training in accredited undergraduate programs and ideally an increase in ethical decision-making knowledge of sport management students. Although an increase in knowledge of ethics may not change the business decisions being made by sport managers. This study sought to identify the perceptions of students who were exposed to ethical theories and decision-making heuristics and the effect of the exposure to ethical decision-making in sport management.

This study qualitatively examined 43 undergraduate sport management students' perceptions of ethical decision-making. The participants were sport management students at two Universities in the Northeast and Midwest United States. Twenty-two of the students were attending an ethics in sport course and were presented multiple ethical theories, 21 of the students had not taken any ethics courses. The participants were given 16 ethical decision-making scenarios from the business context and adapted to the sport management context. The participants were instructed to utilize their understanding of contemporary theories to answer specific questions regarding their perception of ethical decisions based upon human dignity, justice and utility for each scenario. Students in the ethics course group were able to identify the problem within the context of human dignity, justice and utility as presented in the course at a 94% rate. Students in the control group were able to identify the issues within each context only 53% of the time. All 43 participants then were asked what pragmatic solution they would use in each ethical scenario and were limited to a few specific solutions. Results presented that 36.6% of the time the ethics-course sport management students made decisions in direct conflict with their answer of protecting human dignity, justice and utility of the people affected by the scenario. The two groups' answers did not differ in pragmatic solutions. An example of such answers include one scenario presented as an in-depth dilemma about selling sponsorships for a minor league hockey team that was privately known to be bankrupt and possibly on the verge of folding. Students identified the ethical solutions that were in accordance with protecting the rights of stakeholder, but 40% of students indicated they would continue to sell sponsorships as a sound business decision.

Students seemingly were able to learn what ethical decisions would be in the best interest of protecting human dignity, justice and utility but chose solutions that were in conflict with that knowledge. No differences were found between the groups that were presented an ethical coursework and students that were not presented the information in decision-making, so learning may have occurred but ethical decision-making was not affected. Findings for all 16 scenarios will be presented and suggestions outlined for sport management educators to develop ethical decision-making heuristics for their students.